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Certitude of feminism in the novel “Ladies Coupe” by Anita Nair

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Abstract: This research paper explores the feministic concerns in the novel “Ladies Coupe” by Anita Nair. Anita Nair is a female novelist, writer, a poet, a short story writer and a journalist living in Kerala. She is a prominent postmodern Indian writer in Indian English. Some of her works include “Ladies Coupe”, “The Better Man”, “Mistress”, and “Lessons in forgetting”. As a women writer; she beautifully portrays the women psyche in her novels her works dwells with the inner mind of the depressed women by virtue of their feminine sensibility and psychological insights. Her novels generally portray the suppressed women characters in the patriarchal society with a psychological bend of mind, where the outcomes were about the emotional inequalities in a male dominated society. She won Sahitya Academy award and Crossword Prize for her works.

“Ladies Coupe” is a huge success even though its Anita Nair’s second novel. It was first published in 2001 and has been translated into more than twenty five

languages around the world. The title of the novel depicts the Indian treatment of women in the male dominated society. It is common to find special reservation for women in Indian society like Ladies in a queue, ladies special bus, ladies coupe. Indian women get this kind of special treatment in the male dominated society so that women will be safer. The Indian society strongly believes that it is impossible for women to live without the support of men. This novel raises the question of women and men roles in the society. The living conditions of women and different roles played by her in the society as a grandmother, wives, mother, sister, daughter under oppressive patriarchal systems in relation to cultural resistance is seen. In such society women role is limited as reproductive machines and no human qualities are attributed to them. To exemplify the aggressive and assertive nature on the world of Women, they were always represented as incarnation of Sakthi, in legends and great epics.

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Key Words: Anita Nair, Indian Society, Feminism, oppression of women.

The life and its existence in this world is multi faceted - Women play the role of a mother, sister, wife, and daughter and they face an extreme domination by socially, financially even at domestic end. This paper focuses on how Anita Nair projects Indian feminism and attitude through women characters in her novel.

Anita Nair narrates the stories of six women in the novel "Ladies Coupe". The novel revolves around the lives of six women namely Akhilandeswari, Margaret Shanti, Janaki, Prabha devi, Sheela and Marikolanthu. Mainly it showcases the crisis of social norms and inner urge for freedom. The story begins with Akhila, a forty five years old spinster who works as a clerk, brought up in a traditional Tamil Brahmin family who is on a journey to Kanyakumari in search of her inner peace and 'self' and to strengthen her mind towards liberty. All the other women Akhilandeswari, Margaret Shanti, Janaki, Prabha devi, Sheela and Marikolanthu exchange their stories in ladies coupe as Akhila reach Kanyakumari. As the story progress she attains a solution to her problems and finds her inner self by listening to live stories of her co passengers in the coupe. Though, they met for the first

time irrespective of their age, educational background, cultural they share their life's experience with each other. They share a common string of tragic predicament of Indian women in the patriarchal society.

Akhila bears the burden of her family at a very young age after her father's death. Her brothers and sisters grow up and get married and they hardly considered about the Akhila's life and happiness. She is not allowed to live her life on her own it creates an identity crisis in mind of Akhila. She tries to find a solution to her eternal dilemma- whether a woman needs men to led a happy life or she can stay single and be happy. All other women narrate their experiences with men and unfortunately all face negative effects with men in their relationships. All their experiences with men are disgusting and problematic they never find happiness or satisfaction in their relationships.

Jankai, the oldest of the six women in the compartment, she has grown up in the traditional family of being groomed into a subservient daughter, a loyal wife and doting mother. All her life she has been taken care by men. She is someone who is always had a man to care for her. She was protected by father, later by husband and finally by her son at her old age because of which she has become fragile (P.22-23). Even though treated as princess all her life still she is expected to be an obedient

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daughter, sister, wife and mother under the control of men. She never had a chance to explore herself rather all her life she has been subjected to male domination. She affirms for her own identity and freedom.

The youngest of the six women is Sheela, a fourteen years old girl who brings out the story of child exploitation by men in the society. Anita Nair's pragmatic expressed of the scene ashamed Sheela who felt hurt at the unwanted touching of Hasina's father Nazar (Ladies Coupe .66) especially in the scene where she visits the house one Sunday afternoon drenched in sweat and Nazar comes forward and wipes it with his fore finger. Even though the tingling sensation was for a little while in her mind due to age but still she is hurt a combination of adrenaline rush with disgust is well expressed by Nair through Sheela.

Once Nazar saw hurt in Hasina and her mother's eyes knotted the bows (Ladies Coupe .66) after that Sheela took the right decision that she will never visit her house again as a means of her self-protection. Exploitation at young age faced by woman is beautifully drafted by Nair through this character.

Margaret Shanti, another character in the story is a successful chemistry teacher, entwined in an unhappy marriage with Ebenezer Paulraj, the principal of the school in which she works. Margaret

wanted to divorce her husband as he is intensive, self-absorbed and indifferent towards her but, because of the society she lives in she never dared. Her way of taking revenge is to feed him oily food and make him overweight and dreary person.

Prabha Devi is an expert in embroidery and her stitching is so fine that one can hardly spot them, whose ideas were filled with tenderness, and always seen walking with small mincing steps with forever bowed head (Ladies Coupe .170). After her marriage, a week after her fortieth birthday her life swished past in the blur of insignificant days. When she realized that somewhere in the process of being of a good mother, good daughter-in-law and good wife she lost her identity as a woman. She even forgets to be herself in being an ideal wife. This brings a trauma in her life and now she wants to herself as she is tried being an ideal wife. She works very hard to bring a balance between wants she wants to be and what she is expected to be and a shufly in a swimming pool to help her to recognize her own self.

The most pitiful story is that of Marikolunthu, thirty one years old and an unwed mother who is a victim of a man's lust. Her poverty forces her to do many things that violate social cultural traditional norms in the society. Not only being the mother of an illegitimate child, Marikolunthu also experienced poverty,

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rape, lesbianism and physical torture. She is portrayed as a restless spirit warped and bitter at the same time exhibits a quickening vacuum (*Ladies Coupe* .266). The writer finds faults with the social discrepancy and asserts if women are given equal opportunities then they will outrival men in all aspects of life. Nair continues by suggesting that woman should seek that vein of strength by herself (*Ladies Coupe* 210).

One night journey in the ladies coupe and their interaction with the five women helped Akhila to realize that she had given the society a unwarranted power of decree her life. The five different women tell us the different stories and they represent the different cultural economic backgrounds of India. Every woman should fight alone in her life facing all challenges of the society and can stand alone in her journey of life.

Finally, Margaret as well educated and middle aged women has an impressive answer for Akhila's question, as she says one should trust their own instincts and have to find their own answers(*Ladies Coupe* 21)

Akhila also learned the role of instincts in one's life from the case of Sheila, Akhila makes her destiny and got highly influenced from stories of all these women takes a chance her life according to

her will. While Akhila choose Hari as her life partner as he was constantly in her choice *but still the question "what is he doing..."* (*Ladies Coupe* 153).

Conclusion:

Ladies coupe attempts to present women characters across the society and effectively discusses the women characters across the society with economic cultural and social discretion. The Ladies coupe questions the status of women in a traditional bound social order that sees women in a society. Though Anita Nair is a female writer and feminist, she beautifully draws the women sensibilities in the novel. It discusses the tormented female psyche which was subjected to the suppression of the self identity, intrusion of their private self, exploitation, abuse of the female body and mind by the patriarchal society. It considers concepts of marriage and family life as humiliating experiences and proves that they are institutions of suppression and oppression and so the female psyche longs to live a life of loneliness and solitude.

The women are basically pen to their basic physical and emotional needs and uninhabiting to satisfy them. The novel presents the grim reality of the women in the society which focuses on the issue of self realization through the stories of six women from different cultural background.

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